

## **Activity #2: Visit the Classroom**

### **Section 5: Making Connections in Centers**

#### **2. Providing multisensory experiences with themes and words**

Children learn in different ways: Some children learn by hearing, others by seeing, others by doing, and still others by touching and feeling. Centers give children the opportunity to learn vocabulary in tactile and experiential ways. In centers children build an understanding of what a screwdriver is, and does, by using one; they build knowledge of the utility of a blueprint by making one.

The integration of new vocabulary words into every center is also a practice informed by Time Windows Theory. After introducing new words in read alouds, Ursula takes advantage of every opportunity to expose her children to the same new vocabulary words over and over again, until those words become a natural part of her children's expressive and receptive body of language.

---

#### **3. Engaging children with theme-related toys and materials**

When children are engaged and interested, they learn. A center that is well-stocked with theme-related and interesting objects, toys, tools, and materials will draw children into the experience of the center and will prompt children to use (and learn) the words that pertain to that experience.

For example, in Ursula's Construction center, the children have the opportunity to build personal experiences with the construction-related words they're learning through thematic toys and materials: they move the trucks, use the tools, manipulate the materials. Here, the children get to be carpenters, and Ursula calls them carpenters to reinforce and validate their experience. She also scaffolds their vocabulary learning by asking them open-ended questions about the objects as they experience them: What are the tools used for? How do the materials feel? What kinds of things does a carpenter do?

---

#### **4. Vocabulary connections across the curriculum**

Teaching pre-kindergarten children rare words builds a foundation for their future learning in all academic disciplines. Ursula builds this foundation in her Math and Science center, where

the children learn concepts and vocabulary related to the mathematics and science of architecture and construction as they learn about construction materials and words.

They measure and they weigh, using actual scales and tape measures. They begin to think about height, length, depth, and weight. They learn what those words and concepts mean, why they're essential to architects and builders, and how those people go about measuring and weighing. And they learn about relativity: Which object is heavier? Which is the longest?

The center is infused with environmental print as well, with sentence strips posing questions about weight and measurement.

---

### **6. Extending the theme**

Ursula extends her theme by introducing creative, related subcategories: in this case, interior decorating. While developing their fine motor skills in their experimentation with colors, patterns, paper, and scissors, the children are prompted to discuss their plans for the wallpaper: What will it look like? Where will they put it? By expanding and broadening her theme, she opens her children's eyes to the complexity of building and design, the numerous kinds of jobs, objects, plans, people, and materials involved in the construction process.

---

### **7. Learning through play**

When children play, they build essential expressive and receptive language and vocabulary skills. They learn to listen, respond, and take turns. They learn to tell stories, develop and articulate a narrative, and describe situations, people, or objects.

The Hershey's Hardware incarnation of the Pretend and Learn center brings vocabulary into play, and creates a context within which children can use their new words and ideas. In the hardware store, the children talk because there is a reason to talk: The context is sensible. It feels real, and it draws them in. By using the name of the classroom's pet rabbit to name the store, Ursula engages the children and gives them a sense of ownership of the hardware store, the center, and the classroom.

In Hershey's Hardware, Ursula draws out the children's new vocabulary words in discussion, and then takes things one step further by encouraging children to really think about the construction process and the kinds of things one would need in order to complete a project. This gives children the opportunity to try and solve construction-related problems together:

What would one need in order to build a birdhouse? What kinds of materials do people use to get water to a house? What would one use to make a roof?

#### **8. Encouraging writing in centers**

In addition to the actual writing that children do in the Writing and ABC centers, Ursula provides children with materials to pretend to write within the Pretend and Learn center. As they "write" out order slips and receipts, they learn by experience about the importance of print, reading, and writing in expressing ideas and communicating information. These receipts also have words printed on them, further exposing children to theme-related environmental print.

---

#### **9. Interacting with children in centers**

Ursula interacts with children in centers as a co-player. She scaffolds and supports their vocabulary use, ideas, and plans, but does not dominate or change the course of their play or work. As a player, she prompts and inspires conversation by thinking aloud, making observations, verbalizing questions she might have, and wondering about how things might work or feel. She respects the play, and the children respond to her in active ways.

Another strength Ursula demonstrates in her interactions with children in centers is her willingness to use and expose children to formal, specific words and phrases beyond the vocabulary they've learned in read alouds, such as "credit card," "suggest," "automatic," "good service," and "very nice doing business with you." She speaks to the children as she might speak to an actual hardware store owner, providing a model for this kind of interaction.

Ursula's participation in the centers is also a chance for her to conduct small-group informal assessments. For example, when she plays in Hershey's Hardware, she has the opportunity to assess five children at once.